

Committee of Practitioners' Meeting

December 16 – 17, 2008

Tennessee Preparatory School Auditorium

Nashville, Tennessee

Minutes – December 16, 2008

Following the welcome, Dr. Julie McCargar, Executive Director of Federal Programs reviewed the purpose of the meeting, gave a brief overview of the agenda, and had members introduce themselves to the group.

Purpose of the Meeting: Under the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, it is required that stakeholders – Committee of Practitioners – be assembled to provide input on Title I issues, state initiatives, and state policies.

Dr. McCargar introduced Dr. Gary Nixon, Executive Director of the State Board of Education. Dr. Nixon presented the Tennessee Diploma Project and the new curriculum standards in effect for the 2009-2010 school year. He gave a brief analysis of where Tennessee presently stands in graduation rate and preparedness, as well as how we compare on the national level (see Dr. Nixon powerpoint).

The American Diploma Project, which Tennessee joined along with 31 other states, addresses the need to change current educational standards to prepare students for college and careers. This project contains four specific actions:

- Align standards and assessments
- Require students to take challenging courses
- Build college and work-ready measures into statewide accountability systems
- Hold schools – secondary and postsecondary – accountable for student success

The new curriculum standards were then reviewed, with 22 credits now required for graduation. The areas with changes were emphasized:

Math: four credits now required (Alg. I, Geometry, Alg. II, upper level math)

Science: three credits now required (Biology I, Chemistry or Physics, another lab science)

Other: five credits now required (wellness, PE and Personal Finance, Fine Art, 2 years Foreign Language)

Elective Focus: three credits now required (career and technical, science and math, humanities, fine arts, AP/IB, locally approved areas)

Students with disabilities would have alternative performance-based assessments. In addition, specific math and science requirements would be fulfilled.

Graduation with Honors (above readiness benchmarks) and Distinction (B average and additional component (Governor's School, National Merit honors, 31 or higher on ACT) were reviewed.

Dr. Nixon then presented the draft for the Middle Grades Policy Study Committee Proposal that will be discussed at the January State Board of Education meeting (See Middle Grades Policy Handout).

He closed with a handout entitled "The Power of I" that holds students accountable by giving a grade of Incomplete as opposed to "letting students off the hook with an F."

BREAK

Dr. McCargar then continued the discussion of the new curriculum standards by reviewing the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) and how Tennessee's TCAP scores and NAEP scores fail to align.

The four Achievement Levels (Not Proficient, Approaching Proficient, Proficient, and Advanced) were reviewed and descriptions of each discussed (see Achievement Level Descriptors handout).

The six tables were then given two questions to discuss as a group.

- What is your opinion of the state's new more rigorous curriculum?
- How do we prepare for these new expectations?

The groups will report out after the lunch break.

LUNCH BREAK

After lunch, the groups reported out on the two questions listed above. The reactions to the first question included the following comments:

Four levels versus three: this prevents people from putting students "in the middle."

Terminology: why not use the same language as used with the American Diploma Project to have common language.

"Approaching Proficiency" level: not good for future promise for students.

Movement from one level to the next: these steps should be equal for them to remain attainable.

Advanced level: revise language to delete word mastery in the descriptor superior mastery – the term superior mastery is vague and difficult to quantify.

It was the consensus of the groups to use language consistent with NAEP: Below Basic, Basic, Proficient, and Advanced as the descriptors.

The groups then reported on question number two: How do we prepare for the new expectations?

The discussion began with buy in of these standards – teachers, parents, universities who certify teachers, special populations. How do we get the knowledge of these new standards out to parents? One group mentioned “user friendly” terminology with all communications.

Another aspect of preparation for the new standards is the need for preparation – how to motivate students to meet these expectations: content knowledge, skills needed to meet them, parent involvement.

Another group noted the need for support systems such as SES. Districts must pool resources to help students, including using teachers from different schools to tutor, as well as extended lunch periods for more opportunities to help students.

A discussion of the disparity of pay between SES providers and teachers working as after school tutors then ensued. It was suggested that the school register as a provider.

A partnership with higher educational institutions was then suggested: using different departments at the university level to work with districts as tutors. An example was given of how Auburn University partnered with a local school and assisted teachers and students with great success.

The primary recurring point in the group discussion was the need for clear, ongoing communication with parents and other stakeholders.

Dr. McCargar added that the decisions for word choice and descriptors would be finalized at the Board Meeting in April.

Dr. McCargar then introduced Rachel Woods, Communication Director for the Department of Education, who began by reviewing three initiatives in the Department of Education:

- Support of the Pre-K Program
- Updated Website
- Implementation of the Tennessee Diploma Project (TDP)

She continued by reviewing the tactics used by the Communications Department:

- Newsletter – Applebytes (teachers, legislators)
- Website redesign which highlights the TDP throughout
- Parent Involvement Materials
- Electronic Learning Center
- PSAs – to be aired in April, July, and November

The goal of this strategy is to communicate the following: what is the TDP, why are we taking this on, and how is this beneficial to the students in Tennessee schools.

She elaborated by noting that the TDP has been and will continue to be highlighted in all press releases and speaking engagements around the department. The goal is a consistent message communicated through various mediums.

Ms. Woods then gave several examples of how to reach different stakeholders:

- School Board workshops or retreats
- Cluster Meetings
- Videos which are made available to school systems
- State website

A question was then raised about parents who are illiterate or may not speak English in the home. Several suggestions were offered including the publication of several translations of videos and other correspondence, using bilingual students from local high schools, and using the ELL taskforce.

The rollout of these new standards for the TDP to teachers began last summer and will continue this winter and summer. Over 4,000 teachers were trained last summer across the state in specific grade bands and content areas. An additional training was held in December in Grainger County. In February, 2009, the rollout will include guidance counselors for support level training. Phase two will occur across the state in summer 2009. In addition to the aforementioned training sessions, all urban districts had individual training sessions.

BREAK

Dr. McCargar discussed the new Title I Regulations and explained how these regulations had the strength of the law. She began by reviewing the Graduation Rate Disaggregation (see "A Uniform, Comparable Graduation Rate" handout). This rate must be disaggregated in 2011-12 by subgroup. Each subgroup must meet the graduation benchmarks.

The NAEP results will now appear on the State Report Card beginning in 2009.

She then gave a brief explanation of the "N" count. Presently, Tennessee's N count is 45, which means at least 45 students must be in a subgroup for that particular subgroup to count. She added that states will have to defend their N count to the USDOE.

A partner discussion followed: What do you believe the major national themes should be in education?

Responses to this discussion were varied: expanding the school year, utilizing university resources, recruiting quality teachers, reaching true accountability, collaborating with parents, addressing the dropout problem.

Dr. Debra Owens then discussed school reform in Title I schools through the use of School Improvement funds. She reviewed the different funds (1003a and 1003g) and which level each targets. For 2009, the 1003g funds were earmarked for high schools in corrective action or restructuring. These funds were available to 9 LEAs in three allocations:

- General funding
- Planning grant
- Competitive application for High School Redesign

This funding may reach \$500,000 per school if one chooses to compete for the High School Redesign grant. This competitive grant encourages troubled schools to look for models around the nation for ideas and methods that improves student achievement. Some examples may include transition to a charter school, non-traditional school days using virtual classrooms and other innovative programs. These programs must also be sustainable over time.

Dr. Owens referenced the National High School Center which conducts research in education and can help districts with the research across the nation.

Questions about this initiative and other comments followed.

Districts must identify strategies that do not need funding to maintain, including engaging community stakeholders.

The need for a stable funding source was also mentioned. One member suggested a state income tax as a funding source.

Dr. McCargar then opened up the Issue Bin for other comments and concerns.

- -Can Governor Bredesen legally appoint Mayor Karl Dean as head of Metro Schools? Dr. McCargar replied that under Federal law a district can be turned over to a trustee or receivership.
- -How does the English Only initiative in Metro affect education? She noted that by Federal law, we are required to provide services to ELL students. She added that federal law supersedes state law on this issue.
- -When is the TCSP evaluated this year? She noted that the High Priority plans are in and are presently being read. She also reminded everyone of the three-year cycle for TSIP/TCSP. In addition, she encouraged schools to review and update data annually.

December 17, 2008

Dr. McCargar welcomed everyone back for the second day and introduced two members. She then introduced Rita Fentress, Public School Choice and Supplemental Educational Services Coordinator for the State Department of Education.

In her powerpoint presentation, she began by giving a timeline for schools in improvement, noting that there are 74 high priority schools which must offer supplemental educational services (SES). She then reviewed the parameters and requirements for public school choice (PSC), SES and SES providers.

Ms. Fentress then summarized the new regulatory guidance offered by the USDOE with regard to PSC and SES:

- Timely notification to parents
- Parent outreach
- States' responsibilities for SES
- Funding for PSC transportation and SES

Following this overview, Ms. Fentress presented several questions as tabletop discussions.

-How can districts use the 1% set-aside for parent notification?

The responses to this question included the following: hire someone to oversee notification; use the PTA, Booster Club, and community groups; utilize the school website, marquee, announcements, conferences, and phone tree. In addition, the groups noted that more family school liaisons, translators when needed, video or DVD correspondence are all useful in notifying parents.

-How can districts notify parents of PSC 14 days prior to the start of school?

The majority of the responses to this question involved planning ahead and using the resources available. One member noted that schools often know in the spring if they have to offer choice for the following year. It is suggested that districts have plans in place for this notification.

-How can a district develop an individual student learning plan in consultation with the parent and the provider chosen by the parent?

One member cited the Student Academic Report (SAR) used in Memphis for every student needing intervention. The progress is monitored through formative assessment with a district coordinator in each building. Another group noted that a student who has fallen behind needs more supplemental support than twice /week intervention. They added that school-based personnel would be useful for oversight.

After the topics for the tabletop discussion were covered, Dr. Debra Owens addressed the committee and reviewed the changes in the Mandated Operating Procedures (MOP). She noted that the changes were highlighted in bold print (see MOP handout).

A discussion of the monitoring cycle, the method (on-site/desktop), and the high risk schools followed. It was suggested that schools in high priority status have on-site monitoring, as well as districts with new personnel, or districts with other concerns (i.e. fiscal).

Dr. Owens noted that these procedures would be posted on the state website for further review.

Afterward, Dr. McCargar thanked the members who attended, and the meeting was adjourned.